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SIPDIS

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GLOBAL HEALTH AND AFRICA BUREAU FOR KHILL, LPEARSON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [AMGT](#) [AMED](#) [TBIO](#) [KSCA](#) [SENV](#) [EAGR](#) [PREL](#) [SF](#)  
SUBJECT: POST PREPARATIONS FOR AVIAN INFLUENZA

REF: STATE 195603

1.While there are no reports of animal or human infections with the H5N1 strain of avian influenza, there is considerable concern about avian influenza in the South African press and in the mission community. Because South Africa experienced an avian outbreak of f influenza (H5N2) in 2004, which led to widespread poultry and ostrich culling, there is a public expectation that avian influenza will reoccur. News of human deaths due to H5N1 has led to special concerns.

2.In response, Mission South Africa has initiated preparations for animal and human outbreak of avian influenza. Under Chargis direction, post has established a large inter-agency task force (including USDA, APHIS, HHS/CDC, HHS/OGHA, USAID, DHS, Med., Admin, Consular Affairs, Pol., all Consulates, PAS, Peace Corps and others). The Avian Flu Task Force (AFTF) meets every two weeks and shares its output with U.S. Embassies Mbabane and Maseru. Comment: reportedly, Swaziland and Lesotho will rely heavily on RSA because all their imported food passes through South Africa. End Comment. The AFTF has undertaken six tasks:

-To advise Embassy leadership on any questions which arise related to avian and pandemic influenza.

-To form linkages with relevant elements of the the South African Government, local offices of concerned international organizations and other interested government missions, to be fully informed about surveillance findings and local preparations for an avian flu outbreak.

-To prepare an analysis of agricultural concerns and interventions based on information from USDA and local agricultural agencies.

-To compile information of use to the official and unofficial American Communities, including FSNs, to help ensure a reasoned and coordinated response to the avian flu threat - ensuring that all information made available to any agency represented at post is made available to all.

-To develop informative materials and guidelines that would assist individuals concerned about avian flu (based on guidance from CA, CDC, WHO and other approved sources).

-To develop an outbreak management plan for the South Africa Mission.

3.To date, the AFTF has prepared a draft South Africa-specific information document drawn from CA, CDC CDC and WHO guidance for the official and unofficial American Communities in South Africa (Department clearance awaited; text provided in para 5). It has established a site for AI information on the Embassy internet website and a dedicated e-mail address for queries and answers, managed by the task force. It has started development of outbreak communications and management plans, building on the warden network and earlier Embassy emergency plans. And communications have been initiated with international organizations offices in South Africa, other concerned missions (U.K, Canada), and with SAG agricultural and health officials. A separate communication from the Charg has gone to the Director General for Health to provide information from the first IPAPI meeting (reftel) and to offer assistance. On the agricultural side,

according to news reports, the Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute is analyzing Eurasian migratory bird fecal material from Durban harbor. Officials have informed Mission personnel that no H5N1 has yet been found through this surveillance. Ministry of Agriculture and Land Affairs also has just issued recommended biosecurity measures for the poultry and ostrich industries. In addition, the AFTF has assisted individual agencies to complete information requests from their agency headquarters so that all information from South Africa reflects the best collective information available.

4. Post plans to complete its key tasks within two weeks, prior to the expected arrival of avian influenza in the migratory bird population. Additional guidance and information from Department and other USG agencies will be appreciated. Post also would appreciate information from other posts about their preparations.

5. Begin Text:

DRAFT INFORMATION FOR THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY (INCLUDING FSNs). There has been much public concern about the risk of a global outbreak of the H5N1 strain of avian influenza (flu) because it might cause widespread human

illness and death. While a limited number of humans have become infected in the South East Asia region, no cases of human avian flu have occurred in South Africa.

This document is designed to answer common questions related to avian flu. Websites below will provide further information. If you have other questions or concerns related to the possibility of Avian Flu in South Africa, please send them to: [pretoriafluinquiries@state.gov](mailto:pretoriafluinquiries@state.gov). Responses will be posted at the U.S. Embassy website: <http://pretoria.usembassy.gov/>, following coordination with the Medical Unit, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and other informed agencies.

#### Background

The H5N1 strain of avian influenza is a severe viral disease affecting domestic poultry, and wild birds. Humans who have close contact with infected birds, for example by working in a poultry industry where the virus is present, can contract the disease. Since December 2003 approximately 117 confirmed human cases of H5N1 influenza have been reported to the World Health Organization (WHO). About 60 of these persons have died. Sustained human to human transmission of avian influenza has not been detected. Were the virus to mutate, however, and improve its transmissibility between humans, health authorities at CDC and WHO are concerned that a world-wide epidemic might result. The likelihood of such a mutation is debated among scientists.

The H5N1 strain of avian influenza appears to have originated in East Asia. Some wild birds are resistant to the disease but are able to transmit it. Since originally detected, avian influenza has spread across Central Asia to Turkey, Romania and parts of Europe. Bird migration patterns suggest a possible future spread into Africa.

#### Symptoms and Medical Treatment of Avian Influenza

The initial symptoms of avian influenza are similar to those of standard human influenza and include cough, fever and a feeling of illness.

Researchers are developing a vaccine to prevent avian influenza in humans. To date no effective vaccine is available. The standard yearly human influenza vaccination is not protective against avian influenza but the continued use of this vaccine is encouraged. No information is available about avian flu risk in immune-compromised individuals.

The CDC has suggested that an anti-viral medication, oseltamivir (brand name, Tamiflu) may prevent or reduce the severity of the disease. The medication, however, has not been adequately tested to confirm its effectiveness when used to treat human H5N1 virus infection. Based on this limited data, the Department of State has decided to pre-position some Tamiflu at its Embassies and Consulates worldwide. It is yet to be determined specifically who within the Embassy community might have access to this drug or other interventions via Embassy facilities. Tamiflu may not be readily available overseas and the State Department encourages American citizens traveling or living abroad, Foreign Service Nationals and others who are interested in obtaining this medication to consult with

their physicians. There is no provision for the U.S. Government to provide American citizens traveling or living abroad with medications, including in the event of an epidemic.

#### Theoretical Modes of Transmission

It is important to reiterate that routine human-to-human transmission has not yet been detected. If a human-to-human epidemic were to occur, the disease likely would be spread by large respiratory droplets (produced primarily by coughs and sneezes). Theoretically, healthy persons would be able to acquire the disease by touching a surface contaminated by droplets from an infected person and subsequently touching a susceptible area on their bodies such as the mouth, nose or eyes. Healthy persons in close contact with an infected person also could possibly inhale the droplets directly.

#### Commercial Air Travel

The State Department, CDC and WHO have not issued any travel alerts or warnings for avian influenza-affected areas. However, the CDC advises travelers to countries with documented H5N1 outbreaks to avoid poultry farms, contact with animals in live food markets, and any surfaces that appear to be contaminated with feces or fluids from poultry or other animals. In addition, the State Department has asked its Embassies and Consulates to consider public health preparedness measures that take into consideration the fact that travel into or out of a country with an avian influenza outbreak may not be possible, safe or medically advisable.

#### Appropriate Measures to Protect Against Infection

Regardless of whether Avian Flu ever appears in South Africa, individuals and families should implement good hygiene and public health practices to help protect against animal-borne infectious diseases. These include:

- Frequent thorough hand washing especially before eating, before cooking, before feeding infants and before going to bed. Waterless alcohol-based hand gels may be used when soap is not available and hands are not visibly soiled.
- Obtain the standard yearly human influenza vaccination. This will not prevent avian influenza but will greatly reduce the number of persons seeking medical evaluation for cough and fever.
- Avoid poultry farms and contact with animals in live food markets and any environment where birds are kept under unsanitary conditions.
- Eat only well-cooked poultry and poultry products.

#### Public Health Preparedness Measures

The U.S. Embassy in South Africa is preparing outbreak communication plans to have available in the event of an outbreak of human H5N1 virus in South Africa. Individuals should check regularly for current avian flu information on the Embassy internet page (<http://pretoria.usembassy.gov/>).

If there were a human outbreak of H5N1 virus infection, public health prevention measures would seek to limit the exposure of healthy persons to virus particles. Recommended measures during an epidemic may include the following:

- Close schools and minimize other community gatherings,
- Exclude individuals who are sick or fevered from workplaces,
- Consider tele-commuting or other techniques to limit the number of workers in workplaces,
- Remain in your home (home quarantine) with pre-stocked food and water. The duration of any quarantine would be specified at the time of its announcement.

There have been no cases of H5N1 detected in South Africa. The South African Government is conducting surveillance and is developing an outbreak response plan. Embassy, USDA, CDC and USAID officers are in contact with South African officials in the public health, disease surveillance and agricultural sectors to share information and to learn about any H5N1 threats to humans or animals in South Africa.

## Agricultural Concerns

An outbreak of avian influenza of the H5N2 strain (a different strain) occurred among ostriches on a few farms of the Eastern Cape of South Africa during November-December 2004. These farms were quarantined and all poultry and ostriches were culled. Strict quarantine measures were imposed and the disease was contained and eliminated. No transmission to humans was identified. South Africa is currently free of avian influenza. The importation of poultry and poultry products from affected countries is banned.

There is a strong possibility that the H5N1 virus will be transmitted by migratory birds moving from Europe to eastern and southern Africa. Wading birds pose the greatest risk, but these are mainly confined to coastal areas in South Africa. To this end, wild bird fecal samples are being collected and monitored as part of an early warning system in South Africa. Local garden birds should be of little concern. They do not move great distances and are unlikely to be exposed to the virus. If a dead bird is found, use a spade to dispose.

There is no danger of acquiring avian influenza from normally and properly cooked food. Like all viruses, the heat of normal cooking destroys the H5N1 virus.

## What Else the U.S. is Doing

On May 11, 2005, President Bush signed an emergency appropriations bill which contained \$25 million to prevent and control the spread of avian influenza. On September 14, 2005, President Bush announced the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza. This Partnership will bring together key nations and international organizations including UNICEF and WHO to improve global readiness. At the first Partnership meeting 80 countries and 8 international organizations were represented and the groundwork was laid for increasing cooperation.

## Additional Information

Additional updated information regarding avian influenza is available from the following sources:

U.S. Embassy in South Africa  
Pretoria, South Africa  
<http://pretoria.usembassy.gov/>  
To post questions: PretoriaFB@state.gov.

Department of State  
Washington, DC  
Tel: (888) 407-4747, or if calling from overseas, (202) 501-4444  
<http://travel.state.gov>  
For travelers medical information:  
[http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health\\_1185.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1185.html)

Centers for Disease Control (CDC)  
Atlanta, GA  
Tel: (888) 246-2675  
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm>  
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/gen-info/facts.htm>  
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/outbreaks/asia.htm>  
For information on influenza antiviral drugs:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/treatment/>  
For Travelers:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/seasia.htm>

Department of Agriculture  
Washington, D.C.  
<http://www.usda.gov/2005/10/0461.xml>

World Health Organization (WHO) Liaison Office  
Washington, DC  
Tel: (202) 331-9081  
[http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian\\_influenza/en/](http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/)

The Government of South Africa  
Pretoria, RSA  
[http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2005/05101715\\_451005.htm](http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2005/05101715_451005.htm)

End Text

HARTLEY